

Go Granny Go

from Muscadine Lines: A Southern Journal

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Mailing bills at the post office is frustrating. All of a sudden, the money you have worked so hard for disappears through a little slot; you're so worried the money won't reach the creditors on time, you open the slot door again to check and make sure the envelopes didn't get stuck. I don't, however, get too depressed about it. What is more frustrating, though, are the countless cars pulling in and out of parking spaces without looking to see if anyone is behind them.

Easing my truck into the parking space, I cut the ignition and gathered the envelopes. As I walked across the lot, checking to make sure the licked stamps hadn't come off, I almost became a permanent fixture on the pavement, like gum, oil stains, and foodstuff birds eat. The green minivan was upon me before I noticed it, and my hand actually slapped the back door. I leaped (frog-like and awkwardly since I'm so out of shape) ten feet, all the while slowly yelling, "Sh-i-i-i . . . t," sounding like a 45 record on the 33 speed. I turned to see who had it in for me. A stout woman with gray hair was reading her mail and driving. No look of regret for almost having killed me, no apology, nothing. The minivan just putted through the parking lot, leaving little puffs of smoke behind.

"Crazy old bitch," I muttered, "Probably works for one of my creditors." I wanted to chase her, beat on her van, curse her, and demand she take another driver's exam, but I didn't. I figured she was someone's grandmother, and I knew I wouldn't want someone to harass my grandmother just because she couldn't drive.

I didn't always know my grandmother could not drive. I only learned about her disability when I called my mother to see how my grandmother's eye doctor's appointment had gone. Since my grandfather died, Granny's right knee had been replaced, and she was getting ready to have laser surgery on her eyes to remove cataracts. My mother answered on the third ring.

"Mom, I wanted to see how Granny's appointment went."

"The appointment went okay." She paused. "I guess."

"Did something happen? Is she okay?" I felt a thump in my chest.

"Well, you know how she is. You can't tell her a thing. She's gonna do what she wants."

I chuckled, knowing everything was all right; she had only made my mother mad about something, and I was curious to know more. "What'd she do?"

"Of course, the doctor dilated her eyes, and she couldn't see a thing. When we got back to the house, she said, 'Well, I guess I better get going.' I said, 'Mama, you ain't going nowhere. You can't see a thing.' She told me, 'I can too see.' I figured if she could read the correct time on the clock above the fireplace, she'd be okay. 'What time does that clock say then?' She told me the right time, so I said, 'Okay, I reckon you'll be all right to drive then.' With that, she grabbed her purse, got in her car, and took off. I watched her drive away and knew when she couldn't keep that car in the sand ruts of the driveway that she was a disaster waiting to happen. Not three minutes later, I heard tires squealing and a crash that shook the ground. I couldn't bear to go see, so I sent your brother."

"Lord have mercy," I said. "Was she okay?"

“Oh yeah,” Mom said. “She was fine. I guess. There was no sign of her, but an eighteen-wheeler lay on its side in the ditch. Your brother checked on the man and, aside from being mad as hell at the old lady who ran him off the road, he was fine. Of course, your brother didn’t tell him it was Granny. The man said she just pulled right out in front of him. Didn’t look or nothing. That ain’t all. The highway men are painting the yellow lines in the center lanes on both sides of the highway and have these orange cones lined up for miles, so people won’t mess up the paint. Your brother said she drove right down the center of the highway, knocking every cone out of her way for as far as he could see. Probably got that yellow paint all over her tires. Your brother said the sheriff showed up, wrote a report, and put out an APB on her car. I’m too mad to call her. Mad at myself for letting her go and mad at her for being so damned stubborn.”

When my mother said damn, I knew she was upset. Whenever she said it, she said it low while clenching her teeth.

I called my grandmother to check on her.

“I’m doing fine,” she said.

“You have a little mishap today after your eye appointment?”

“I knew your Mama would tell everybody. Never could keep her mouth shut.”

Of course, my mother had told only me. She would have been too embarrassed to tell anyone else. My grandmother didn’t say anything about the cones or the paint on her tires, and I didn’t want to ask. When I asked why she didn’t stop to check on the truck driver, she said.

“Well, I figured if he was dead, I couldn’t help him. If he was hurt, I couldn’t do nothing either. If he was okay, he might beat me up.”

I didn't tell my grandmother there was an all points bulletin for her vehicle. Quite frankly, I wanted to believe that would worry her. Truth is, I think she could have cared less because the sheriff is her cousin, and he wouldn't do a thing to her anyway. If he came to her house and tried, she'd fill him full of her blue ribbon pecan pie, and he'd forget all about it.

My grandmother had her cataracts removed and claimed she could see as well as she used to when she was young. She was seventy-four then, and now she is eighty and still driving, except when her new boyfriend takes her places.

My family first thought it was "cute" that my grandmother's hairdresser had matched her with an old widower even though she was scared to go out with him at first. "What if he takes me out on some back road and rapes me?" she had asked my mother. "He's eighty-four. What could he possibly do?" Mom had responded.

When family called to check on her, she would be gone with him. Then family members said, "Better than sitting in front of the TV." After a few months, their attitudes changed. She didn't call them, and she was never home. When they did reach her, he was there, and she would cut them off, so they started saying, "Good God. A woman her age carrying on like a teenager. Daddy would turn over in his grave if he knew this."

Me? I say, "Go, Granny, go!"